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Bloomington

Future 'clearing' for IU observatory

By Brian McCoy

Daily Student Staff Writer

The sky has been bright outside the Kirkwood Observatory in recent nights.

So bright, in fact, that Martin Burkhead, associate professor of astronomy, has commented, "We have a permanent moon outside the observatory."

The "moon" — external light that hinders the observatory's telescope — blocks the stars and is, in part, the result of the nearby law school expansion. The construction of a new wing has brought such an influx of internal and external lighting that it threatens to render the observa-

tory completely useless.

But now — because of a compromise worked out between the law school, University Physical Facilities and the astronomy department — the only moon outside the observatory is a comforting 239,000 miles away.

The compromise calls for the installation within the observatory of a control to close the law school's shades when the observatory is in use. A second control would turn off the external lights on the path around the observatory.

The ability to see the stars

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Compromise 'clears' way for IU observatory

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through the observatory's 12-inch telescope has been threatened in recent years by Bloomington's increasing number of lights and, even more directly, by lights from the addition.

Burkhead has been concerned about the latter from the very start. When Burkhead learned of the proposed law school expansion he warned, in January of 1982, "the observatory will be ruined if the building is big enough."

The problem has been solved through compromise. The law school windows were fitted with automatic shades that would

close "on a seasonal time schedule," said law school acting dean Maurice Holland.

"I thought this was going to have some difficult compromise," Holland said, adding that the final solution to the problem was to install the shades' light-switch-like control mechanism in the observatory. Professors "could shut the shades down whenever they needed to use the observatory," Holland said.

The best laid plans though are subject to mechanical problems. The shades were to be fully operational by the start of the spring semester, but are currently still not working.

A second problem concerned the lights along the path that runs behind Bryan Hall and past the observatory.

These clear-domed, sodium vapor lights sit atop 10 to 12 foot poles and are so bright they render the lights within the law school inconsequential, Burkhead said, adding the lights shine on the observatory dome.

There has been, among student groups like IUSA, a call for better lighting on campus. One result from this is a university policy to install more outdoor lights "as part of each new building project on campus," said Terry Clapacs, Physical Facilities direc-

tor.

The law addition, Clapacs said, was "a good opportunity to add lights and make that a safe walkway."

Burkhead maintains the lights have done little to increase safety in the area.

"The lights aren't doing anybody any good walking on the ground," he said. "If they're shining on the dome, they're not shining on the ground."

There are also smaller, waist-high lamps in the area and they too are hampering the observatory's effectiveness,

To find a solution to the prob-

lem, meetings were held this spring at the observatory and a plan formalized.

Under the plan, a control to turn off the tall lights was installed in the observatory along with the control for the law school shades. It will enable the observatory to extinguish the lights whenever the telescope is being used.

The moving and installing of the mechanisms cost \$1,400 and both should be operational "by the first of July," said Joe True, architect and director of operations, University Physical Facilities.